

**Vice-Chair Rosemary Rodriguez Remarks Before House
Committee on House Administration, Elections Subcommittee**

August 2, 2007

**Thank you Chair Lofgren and Ranking Member McCarthy
inviting me to give comments today.**

**As a new member of the Election Assistance Commission, I
believe it is an important and necessary agency.**

**Our primary goal must be to ensure that every eligible American
has the best chance to cast a ballot and see it counted.**

**While we must work with election officials to ensure that they
have the tools to do their job, our first allegiance must always be to the
voters. Conflicts between these interests are exceedingly rare, but when
an issue arises that creates tension, we have a duty to come down on the
side of the voter.**

**I emphasize that the EAC has accomplished much since Congress
enabled it. I commend the current Commissioners and those who
preceded me for their diligence and hard work.**

But to fulfill our mandates, we need to do more.

First, the Commission must become fully transparent and accountable.

Any hint of secrecy, political motivation, or political litmus in those who administer elections is anathema to all Americans.

Therefore, the EAC must disavow any procedures that suggest a hidden agenda, and thus invite cynicism.

At my first Commission meeting, I recommended that the EAC conduct staff briefings and make policy decisions in sunshine, limiting the tally vote to only the most routine decisions. And as long as I am a Commissioner, I will continue to urge it to adopt these and other policies and procedures, and to memorialize them in written documents that are available to the public.

Only then can the public see the decisions the EAC is making, understand the reasons for them, and know that they are being made to benefit the election process for voters, rather than for partisan gain.

Second, the Commission must become more transparent and accountable in its contracting procedures and research protocols. We have already begun this.

On April 16, the EAC directed its Inspector General to conduct a thorough review of the Commission's contracting procedures, including two projects that examined voter ID and voter fraud and intimidation. I mention these two projects specifically because I acknowledge that our handling of them created confusion and speculation.

We should accept well-founded criticism on their handling and take steps to ensure that the errors we made do not happen again. We expect the IG's report soon and, I anticipate that the Commission will make its recommendations the keystone of our work-plan.

Finally, we must better communicate with our oversight committees and all members of Congress about the work of the EAC.

Let briefly mention two other important items.

States are establishing the statewide voter databases required by the HAVA. I am hopeful that when the databases are completed, we will be able to say with confidence, to you and to the American people, that they are accurate and efficient. That is not a foregone conclusion, however, because the databases are difficult to build and maintain. You may want to invite us back to report on their status.

Congressional staff members have asked about provisional ballots. The Congress authorized the use of provisional ballots to make sure that voters were provided with every opportunity that their ballot will count.

They should never be used as a tool to disenfranchise voters. I believe we should continually monitor their usage.

I am having a series of meetings with voters and voter advocates in anticipation of the 2008 election. It will be my goal to make sure that the issues they identify are those considered and addressed by the EAC as the country prepares for 2008.

In conclusion, the EAC commissioners and staff want to see the promise of HAVA fulfilled.

We want voters in America to be confident in voting equipment tested by the labs we accredit.

We want election officials to adopt our guidelines because they are thorough and reasonable.

We want the States to implement voter databases that guarantee voter access, not impede it.

We want to provide a clearinghouse that is informative and relevant. We want to be sure that voters who need provisional ballots will see them counted if and when their registration is certified.

And finally, we aspire to see Americans believe and trust the results of our elections.

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